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A LETTER

TO THE SHAREHOLDERS

OF THE

CRYSTAL PALACE COMPANY.

BY GEO. L. PURCHASE.



LONDON:

PRINTED BY HANCOCK & HUMPHREY, 37, WOOD STREET, CITY.

SOLD AT ALL THE RAILWAY STATIONS.

Price Sixpence.

1855.

TO THE

SHAREHOLDERS

OF THE

CRYSTAL PALACE COMPANY.

GENTLEMEN,

In directing the following pages to your notice I will state plainly at the outset, that their object is simply to promote the welfare of the Crystal Palace. I am especially urged to address you because of what is said and written upon this subject, practical suggestions for the improvement of that which is generally condemned are seldom offered, and for that reason the following remarks, which a somewhat long and intimate connection with your undertaking enables me to submit, are put forward for your consideration.

In the first place, the management of the Company may be considered retrospective and prospectively. Your scheme has been realized mainly by a body of gentlemen who have, for a prolonged period, devoted to it a considerable portion of their valuable time. The zealous attention they paid to their self-imposed duties in developing this great enterprise entitles them to your gratitude. Unquestionably, if there could be a recommencement some things would be done differently; but when the novel character of the undertaking, and the magnitude and diversity of the works are considered, it may fairly be a matter for congratulation among the Shareholders that all has been accomplished so well. So far the creation of the Crystal Palace is spoken of; when it is considered as a remuneratory speculation there is no such reason for satisfaction.

Upon the opening of the Palace the Directors appear not to have adapted themselves to the new state of circumstances, or to have applied themselves with proper energy to meet the requirements that soon manifested themselves in the working of the concern. This want of application at a critical time of the Company's existence no doubt has been very detrimental, and placed the success of the undertaking in jeopardy. Now eighteen months have passed since the Crystal Palace was launched under very fair auspices, but certainly during this time its prospects have become more and more gloomy. At the last Meeting of the Shareholders, held in August last, the chief congratulation offered them was upon the national character of the undertaking, and the visits paid to the Palace by Her Majesty and other potentates.

Directors take upon themselves a heavy responsibility. Upon the wisdom of their measures depend the prospects, the position, and happiness of many. They should not hug the power they have not the ability to wield, or retain it in order to advance their private advantages. The distinction between a mismanaging Board of Directors, which conceals its incapacity by issuing reports, false in word or spirit, or misleads by duplicity or chicanery of any kind, and a set of criminals, is not great. The result may be the same, although the motives may be different.

An oligarchical form of direction may have been the best during the creation of the Crystal Palace, and may be so still to some extent, until the questions of the disposal of the surplus land, and the closing of the capital account are finally settled; but for the permanent working of the Company a constitutional government will be more conducive to its welfare.

Under the present system the occasions of your meeting together, and with the Directors, occur singly and at such long intervals that they are insufficient for the proper consideration of matters in which you are deeply interested, and in which some of you have a great pecuniary stake. The assembly upon these occasions is too boisterous for the proper transaction of important business, although in the unruly outbursts of sentiment there is mingled a vast deal of sound sense. Without concert, and under other disadvantages, you feel yourselves confronted with the small body of Directors disciplined, organized, discreet (upon these occasions) and under the generalship of a clever chairman, a wily strategist, ever ready to take advantage of the ill-directed irregular fusillade of complaining Shareholders. Under such circumstances, reports, however lame, escape comprehensive scrutiny. The business of the day is got through amid confusion of motions and tangles of amendments, and the company disperses unsatisfied, and perhaps with a sentiment that, for another six months, its interests remain in the hands of persons in whom it cannot place implicit reliance. For the permanent working of an institution like the Crystal Palace, relying solely upon the public, either as visitors or exhibitors, for support, there is peculiar need that the Shareholders should think for themselves, and speak for themselves, because among them are persons who can represent every class of the public—the class that looks upon the Palace as a place for recreation and enjoyment, another that regards it as a place for study and instruction, and the portion of the community that would seek in it a medium for commercial transactions. By learning the opinions of the Shareholders, we surely and fairly acquaint ourselves with the feeling and requirements of the public.

Further reformation in the management would be attained by the appointment of a manager furnished with ample discretionary powers and undivided command. The destiny of the Crystal Palace would depend, in no small degree, upon the judicious selection of a person to fill this important post. Such a functionary must be endowed with accurate and extensive knowledge to develop the numerous sources from which it strives to produce attraction and revenue. He must have a practical acquaintance with arts, sciences, mechanical appliances, and commercial matters; with ability to command, and to apply and economize materials and labor. His zealous attention should be given wholly to the Crystal Palace.

It will be paying to Sir Joseph Paxton no undeserved tribute, to state that he is one of the most able persons to occupy this responsible position; but from the several ways in which his ability has developed itself, it appears improbable that he could comply with the last named requirement; still his valuable assistance might be retained for the benefit of the undertaking to which he has contributed so much.

I will now touch, curtly, upon some other salient points for your attention.

1st.—The surplus property.

2nd.—The defects of the Building.

3rd.—The means of access and regress.

4th.—The revenue and working expenses.

5th.—The Refreshment department.

The first item is of a kind difficult to dilate upon here. It may be well to reiterate the fact, generally well known, that the Company is responsible for the outlay of some twenty-five

or thirty thousand pounds upon the sixty-seven acres of Dulwich Wood property, within about two years from the present time. The Shareholders should look well to the disposal of this and the other surplus property. In laying out this beautiful ground for building, there should be a complete system of drainage and other sanatory measures undertaken or enforced; and extensive hotel accommodation obtained contiguous to the Palace.

The second point embraces a subject of more importance than may be generally supposed. In plain terms, your building is defective in some important respects. Until the defects are remedied, the building is unfit to contain the valuable objects collected in it. The state and durability of the building may be left to speak for themselves; suffice it to say, the wood gutters of the roof, and the ventilators, are not proper for a permanent building; that the decay of the substructure will be hastened by the profusion of water used in gardening: in fact, the attempt to familiarize so many heterogeneous things, will be attended with great and lasting expense. It will be discovered that the Crystal Palace makes an unrivalled conservatory; but as a repository for works of art or industry, it is open to some objections.

Thirdly.—The success of this enterprize greatly depends upon the facility of coming and returning. Experience has shown that the present railway transport is insufficient upon ordinary occasions during the most favorable months; and by the increasing numbers it is hoped the West End Line will bring, the difficulty of access from the railway station, and what is of still more importance, the delays, the difficulties and annoyances of returning in the evening, will become greater. The assembly at the Palace aggregates during the day, but nine-tenths of it want to return at about the same time. The result is, that upon most evenings during the summer, there is a dense and dangerous crowd striving to gain admittance to the railway station. The scenes to be witnessed then are highly discreditable to the management. They are extremely detrimental to the undertaking. As long as they are enacted, you cannot expect, you deserve not, the full support of the public.

To state cases without proposing remedies is not my purpose. It cannot be expected that the rail is able to carry away this great reflux of persons as rapidly as it gathers; but the consequent delay can be made tolerable, and the discreditable scenes mentioned, impossible. In the South, or Railway Wing, together with the spacious tower at its extremity, at present quite unappropriated, there is space to control, sort, and arrange the visitors as they return *en route* to the Railway Station. Here may be formed a number of compartments or waiting-rooms, provided with seats and other conveniences; refreshments may be sold, and newspapers, periodicals, &c., also, or lent for a small sum. The public could be arranged without confusion in these compartments, according as they are proceeding to the West End, London Bridge, or the intermediate stations, or returning by excursion trains. Communications may be maintained with the managers at the railway station, so that the occupants of compartments may proceed direct to the carriages, and be dispatched without further delay.

The entrances and exits for Visitors by road are awkward and mean. Outside should be covered ways and drives to the doors. Much of the confusion upon special occasions might be prevented by adopting a system of telegraph posts, upon which the numbers of the carriages required at the sorties could be elevated.

The staircases and approaches are perhaps the most faulty details of arrangement in the whole design. How inadequate are the ways of communication between the building and the grounds! From the centre-transept, if not from the three transepts, there should be a noble staircase, in keeping with the general design, and commensurate with the immense building and gardens.

The approach to the main building of the Palace from the Railway Station is arduous and bad in many respects. Persons from the railway enter the building at one corner, through an

incongruous assortment of objects. By continuing the wing to the south end of the nave, the visitor would be brought direct into the great avenue of the building, and the magnificent beauty of the nave would be seen at once.

Fourthly. The revenue and working expenses.

The great source of revenue will be the Paying Visitors, and the Annual-Ticket holders, while the existing policy is pursued. The minor sources depend, directly or indirectly, upon the numbers that resort to the Palace. The value of space and receipts from Refreshment Department will be regulated by the number of Visitors.

The Annual revenue and expenditure may be stated briefly thus :—

Receipts from Paying Visitors	£68,000	
Working Expenses (average)	60,000	
	<hr/>	£8,000
Receipts from Annual-Ticket holders	20,000	
Interest on £300,000 Debentures, Preference Shares, and unpaid Purchase-money	19,000	
	<hr/>	£1,000
Revenue from Space, Sales on Commission, Refreshments, &c.	16,000	
	<hr/>	£25,000

Available for Dividend upon a Capital of £1,000,000.

A-propos to this part of our subject, is the question of "Life Admissions." To elucidate this difficult problem, let us ask :—What is the saleable price of a Life Admission?

2ndly. What would be the number granted upon the first year of issue, and during subsequent years?

Should Life admissions be granted indiscriminately upon the surrender of shares and for cash? In that case, a large portion might be taken for young persons whose claims would not, in all probability, expire for a long period.

Should they be sold at a price fixed by a sliding scale, and regulated by the age of the buyer?

Life admission holders may be considered as annuitants; but, with this difference—that change of residence, indisposition, and engagements at all times would prevent some using their privilege.

Twenty-five thousand Annual Tickets have been disposed of at One Guinea. Would a larger number of Life Tickets at Five Pounds, or upon the surrender of two ordinary shares, be issued upon the first year?

Suppose twenty-five thousand Life Tickets were granted; they would supersede, probably, nearly one-half of the Annual Tickets. Taking £20,000 as the yearly receipts for Annual Tickets, the loss on this item would be £8,000. In the second year, the issue of Life Tickets might be reduced to seven thousand; and in subsequent years, to five thousand; whilst the Annual Tickets might remain at twelve thousand.

The Life-Ticket-holders would be composed of shareholders and persons who would otherwise be Annual-Ticket holders, and of other shareholders.

If so, the financial result of this measure may be stated thus:—

FIRST YEAR.

Receipts from Paying Visitors	£65,000
„ for 25,000 Life admissions (partly applied to maintenance)	5,000
„ for Annual admissions	12,000
„ for Space, Refreshments, &c.	18,000
	<u>£100,000</u>

Working Expenses, average	£60,000
Interest on £300,000 of Debentures, Preference Shares, &c.	19,000
	<u>79,000</u>

Profit £21,000

Available for Dividend on a Capital of about £760,000.

SECOND YEAR.

Receipts from Paying Visitors	£65,000
„ for 7,000 Life admissions (partly applied to maintenance)	5,000
„ for Annual admissions	12,000
„ for Space, Refreshments, &c.	18,000
	<u>£100,000</u>

Working Expenses, Interest, &c.	79,000
	<u>79,000</u>

Profit £21,000

Available for Dividend upon a Capital of about £710,000.

SUBSEQUENT YEAR.

Receipts from Paying Visitors	£65,000
„ for 5,000 Life admissions (partly applied to maintenance)	4,000
„ for Annual admissions	12,000
„ for Space, Refreshments, &c.	19,000
	<u>£100,000</u>

Working Expenses, Interest, &c.	79,000
	<u>79,000</u>

Profit £21,000

Available for Dividend on a Capital of £680,000.

If these suppositions are near the mark, there appears little reason for apprehension about the Life and Annual Ticket Holders excluding any portion of their own bodies. The Patriotic Fund Fête afforded a measure of the capacity of the building; the returns show about 40,000 persons, and this would appear to be fully as many as can be properly contained inside the building at the same time. It may be argued that 80 or 90 thousand were within the Hyde Park Exhibition at the same time, but it should be remembered that there the sources of interest were spread over the whole building, including the galleries, whereas at the Sydenham Palace, upon special occasions, the attraction has been centred at some particular part of the building.

In the reply of the Directors, made in May last, to the proposals of a Committee of Shareholders upon this subject, it is observed that if 100,000 Life Admissions were taken instead of 20,000, as in the other supposed alternative, the Life Ticket holders “would far more than fill the Building, and exhaust the means of transport to it.”

Omitting special occasions, we shall find that during the past summer of the 25,000 Annual ticket holders the greatest number at the Palace, on any day excepting Saturday, has been about 1,000; from this is shown, that, with 100,000 Life Admissions, there would be 4,000 or 5,000; and that the greatest number of Annual ticket holders, on a Saturday, has been 3,750, which would give 15,000 of the 100,000 Life ticket holders.

For meeting the difficulty of special occasions, when 90,000 of the 100,000 Life Ticket holders might be present, special arrangements must be made. Cannot the Palace and Park contain much more easily the same number of persons as the interior of the Hyde Park Exhibition? The way to provide for the comfort and safety of such an immense number of persons, is to diffuse the attractions over the Building and to the confines of the Park; to avoid, by all means, a great preponderance of interest at any spot. Arrangements could be made by which the number in the Palace, at the same moment, might be limited. If the congregation or transport of so many persons should be found to be attended with great objections, or insuperable difficulties, then increase the number of special occasions, and issue among the Life Ticket holders a limited number of admissions, transferable among them, for the day.

Three-fourths of the Visitors to the Palace belong to the trading and working classes; and from them the undertaking will derive its chief revenue. Consequently it is necessary, above all things, to provide for these classes suitable attractions. The Fountains will be the great sight. The Music, a strong and universal attraction. The Grounds, with pure air and lovely scenery; the Gardens, enlivened by birds and other auxiliaries, will always be appreciated by the toiling classes who seek above all things, during their brief suspense from labour, change and novelty.

So far the Crystal Palace adapts itself to the feelings and impulses of the people; but with these attractions it blends instructive things. The Crystal Palace has failed to impart the knowledge it might; not from want of means, but from want of using the means it possesses. It should make itself intelligible to the humblest intellect. It should stretch out a friendly hand to lead the most undeveloped mind to understand what is prepared for its instruction. With all this, it need not sacrifice one jot of its high pretensions as a school for the educated.

Let us consider how this may be done. Let every object bear a curt, intelligible explanation; let its name, purpose, or use, be written in plain English, without abbreviations. Remember, we are addressing living Englishmen. Let the name of each court, what it represents, and why it was erected, be announced in a manner to arrest the eye. To every object let there be attached the information about it, hitherto contained only in the hand-books. As a further means of elucidating the inexhaustible supply of information to be obtained from the Art, Science, and Industry-Collections, let there be given Lectures, teeming with rudimentary knowledge, avoiding art-gossip, scientific pomposity, and technical phraseology.

These suggestions may be applicable to the Geological, Ethnological, Zoological, Botanical, Fine Arts, Agricultural Implements, Raw Produce, and Machinery departments.

Some of these departments require a *Key*.

The Fine Arts department should contain diagrams showing the effect of combinations of vertical, horizontal, oblique, and curved lines; the contrasts, harmony, and purpose of colour, &c.

Hand-in-hand with Architecture and Sculpture, should be their associates, Engineering and Building. Models of the extraordinary and useful works which will remain a characteristic feature of this age. Samples of all kinds of materials used in the construction of Domiciles, Warehouses, Farm-buildings, Ships, Docks, Railways, Canals, Mines, &c., accompanied by explanations and illustrations of their manufacture, composition, chemical properties, applications, strengths, gauges, measures, and durability. Measures for Sanatory improvement; the various contrivances for Ventilating, Draining, Smoke Consuming, Disinfecting, &c., should be collected and classified. New Inventions should be tested; and Hydrostatic power employed for ascertaining the strength of substances.

Again, the art of Painting has not yet been successfully represented. What is more generally pleasing than pictures and music? There is no lack of space, or want of facilities. By

erecting a temporary partition down the centre of the nave, somewhat in the way adopted for the Horticultural Exhibition, a fine gallery could be made at a trifling expense, considering the immense wall-space obtained.

Promoters of memorials to eminent persons might be induced to erect their statues in the Palace grounds; conformably, however, with a general design. These would contribute towards the national character of the Institution.

The key to the Machinery and Agricultural Implements Departments, should contain a set of all kinds of mechanical motions, specifying for what purposes each is chiefly employed.

What else can be done to draw people to the Palace? The reservoirs in the park, afford ice for skating, which, perhaps, may be made superior by the water supply at the command of the Company; and there is spare space in the park, as yet almost unexplored by visitors, for Cricket, Archery, and other proper public games. These auxiliaries would produce considerable attraction, and assist towards the solution of the problem, "how to accommodate large numbers of persons."

Having been induced to dilate somewhat freely upon matters connected with the revenue, I will now consider, very briefly, the other portion of the section.

The Working Expenses.—The safest way of economizing is by the introduction of machinery for human power. The Crystal Palace, from the multiplicity of its same parts, is peculiarly suited for the use of machinery. A great permanent saving will be obtained by putting the Building and its contents into substantial repair; by correcting the defective structural details before alluded to, in order to arrest the present rapid decay; and by keeping everything in repair. Remember the old adage, "A stitch in time saves nine."

The last item—the Refreshment Department—remains to be considered.

This department has not been planned in a comprehensive manner, nor, in working, does it answer to the wants of the public. To put it upon a proper footing, places should be erected outside the present building expressly adapted for its purposes, and fitted with every convenience requisite at the most popular Dining Houses and Cafés in London. Refreshments of all kinds should be supplied nearly as cheap as at such places. The buildings should be suited for summer and winter. It may be suggested that it is unwise to erect new buildings whilst there remains much vacant space in the Palace. To that may be replied:—All the space may be made valuable if the present slovenly conduction was supplanted by a vigorous management.

In conclusion, may be said:—The Crystal Palace must not be a Museum for the works of past ages merely on account of their antiquity, or a repository for the productions of semi-barbarous nations because of their curiosity. It must keep in advance of the world, and be prepared to meet the requirements of the times as they are presented. To be thoroughly popular, it must attract the body as well as the mind.

If any of the suggestions offered in this brief treatise assist to steer the leviathan enterprise to a successful issue, the purpose for which it has been written, will have been accomplished. Much more might be written upon the subject, but I fear now too much has been stated.

I have the honour to be, Gentlemen,

Your most obedient Servant,

GEO. L. PURCHASE.

7th Dec., 1855,
Upper Norwood, Surrey.